



## Session 115, Issue 1

Friday, February 15, 2008



In this short session of the Indiana General Assembly, the House and the Senate have made property tax reform their top issue. It has been, without a doubt, one of the most intense sessions I have experienced, and because of my role as a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, I've been an active participant in the many hearings on the proposed legislation. For that reason, it's been challenging to keep up with my goal of keeping you up-to-date on what's happening in Indianapolis.

As you probably know, the House of Representatives has passed a comprehensive

property tax bill, HB 1001. Likewise, the Indiana Senate has also passed several bills relating to the property tax issue. Currently, the House bill is in the Senate, and we have taken up the Senate bills. All bills must pass out of committees by Thursday, February 21 and out of the respective houses by Tuesday, February 26.

While the lengthy deliberative process can be frustrating at times for both legislators and their constituents, I'm continually reminded that opening the doors for public comment is the only sure way to arrive at sound proposals. It

would be tempting in the short session to create quick fixes that appear to address the immediate concerns of homeowners, but we must take into consideration not only the need to keep property taxes affordable, but to take into account our current economic conditions and how they could lead to unintended negative consequences in the essential services provided by local and state government.

Both houses remain optimistic that we will reach a solution by the end of session on March 14 that will provide a basis for ongoing reform.

### Older Youth Foster Care

In addition to my efforts in property tax reform, I have also authored House Bill 1290, which allows older youth from age 18 to 21 to continue to receive foster care benefits. It has passed the House and is awaiting a vote in Senate Committee. This important legislation helps to transition foster children to self-sufficiency and life as a functioning adult.

A recent study indicates that children aging out of Foster Care are far more likely to experience homelessness, become victims of crime, and are 7%

more likely to commit crimes themselves. By age 21, twenty-five percent of them do not graduate from high school or obtain a GED. Only 2% of them obtain as much as an associates degree from college.

Female youth who remained in foster care were 35% less likely to become pregnant by age 19. At age 21, the median income of children leaving foster care is only \$5,450, while their counterparts coming from more traditional families earned \$9,120.

This bill has been heard in a Senate committee and has been amended substantially. It should receive a final vote next week.

## Homeless Youth Legislation

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Another of my bills, House Bill 1165, addresses issues that create youth homelessness and helps to bridge these youth to the appropriate services. This bill passed the House unanimously and this week passed the senate with only one dissenting vote.

The bill's provisions are based on the testimony we heard in the Homeless Youth Summer Study Committee about the challenges faced by youth in shelters with their parents and those who are "runaways" or "throwaways" and are not living with their parents. In addition, it addresses some of the issues that cause nearly 20% of youth who have aged out of foster care to become homeless.

For me, the committee testimony of a former house staff member who experienced life on the streets as a runaway teen was the most powerful voice in favor of the bill. She related the barriers she had faced in finding shelter and services – and the fact that because they were unavailable to her she found help “on the other side of the law.”

No Indiana youth should be forced to make those choices. Testimony from youth-serving organizations and other formerly homeless youth clearly validates the need for the changes this bill will create, including allowing 16 – 18 year olds for whom parental consent cannot be obtained to access

certain services.

The bill also contains educational provisions that promote educational continuity for foster youth and those in shelters. If these at-risk youth are to succeed, it's our job to create on-ramps they can use to access the services that can help them build a positive and healthy future.

HB 1165 is the result of an Interim Study Committee on Missing and Homeless Youth I chaired last summer and fall. Sen. Vaneta Becker served as vice-chair, and Rep. Suzanne Crouch was a member of the committee.

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